

excerpt from *Consonance*
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Somewhere incomprehensible distances away black holes are sucking light into the back of time-space's throat. This I find reassuring, that even as everything burns numberlessly, the brightness of information is being ushered away.

Nested

We saw the cell, gathered and embraced like us in its own skin. But the belly button is evidence that we are made things. That we are not hermetic, are susceptible to opening. The nano knocks and we are always answering. Still there is no one who can tell me how life exactly began, how matter sifted together into a movement that vibrates and sings. Into an organization that works. Into pollen pouring across landscapes, fireflies rising in unison. Into an orange poppy inside of which there is an infinity of orange poppies. It was nearly forever that the bacteria, algae, and protozoan scurried about. Alone. And now we live in a bacterial world, are constantly cutting back, wiping away, swallowing. All dressed up in virus with no place to go.

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Zoos are the most obvious antidote to our subtraction by addition. What is far from us, exotic, frightening, we cull together like a sentence. But there is not a grammar that can account for this failure. Nearly all of our experiences of animals are through images. If I was asked to draw an elephant I would forget the shape of its skull and ankles. When we get imaginative we put a horn on a horse and glitter the scene with unicorns. Extraction breeds extraction. I have been to this particular zoo three times and every time the albino crocodile is lying in the same spot in the same position with the same alarming stillness. It looks dead, especially because it appears bleached, though this is just its natural lack of pigment, probably ultimately the reason for its entrapment. Little effort has been made to recreate natural habitats. Perhaps the zoo administrators fear this would encourage wildness.

Nested

We carry in us manufactured shapes—dentures, stent, artificial eye, turbine heart, cochlear implant, hip-joint replacement. Ever editorial are our dreams. Elsewhere, diamonds are pulled up out of the earth, finagled and hustled to *mean*.

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Celebrities are like animals, our relationship to them based on copies, distance. They are detached, yet seem so near to us, like brinish black olives in our mouths. A whole industry of images attests to our addiction. We chart their pregnancies and failures. Inside Madonna there is another Madonna, and inside her another, and yet another; endlessly irretrievable is the tiny Madonna at the end of matter. Others are penned in their penthouse suites and Hollywood homes and we are clambering to sic our Cerberus spotlights on them. We wish there was a feeding time, an overhead announcement that Angelina would be let out of her movies for a live performance, that we could run our fingers along her manta ray spine.

Nested

The frame makes a pool of our faces. We are a family represented as a family. We are over there. We are viewable at a distance. We can fit in my pocket. Locket for those who are gone. The air in the ambulance is balmy yet stale; the patient is strapped to the stretcher as the whole of the instant curves through the streets like a needle sewing up the night. The sound of emergency is faint, like a lullaby.

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I open the paper and 51 more are dead. It is as if my casual morning read has caused this. I am reminded of my ineffective nature, of my smallness. Of our enduring cruelty. The US government sends life-size cardboard replicas of active duty soldiers to their families. These are meant to curb the severe sense of abandonment felt by their children, to portray less distance. The cut-outs are called Flat Daddys. One mom props her husband's six-foot cut-out by the swing-set while her son plays. Another puts hers on the couch and covers him with a blanket. It is a visual operation.

Nested

Take, as evidence of the bewilderment of form, the turducken: a partially de-boned turkey stuffed with a de-boned duck which itself is stuffed with a small de-boned chicken. The thoracic cavity of the chicken and the rest of the gaps are sometimes stuffed with a highly seasoned breadcrumb mixture or sausage meat. Take, as evidence of the exhaustion of forms of subjugation, this: the largest recorded nested bird roast included 17 birds, attributed to a royal feast in France in the early 19th century (originally called a *Rôti Sans Pareil*, or "Roast Without Equal")—a Garden Warbler stuffed into an Ortolan Bunting, into a lark, into a thrush, into a quail, into a lapwing, into a plover, into a partridge, into a woodcock, into a teal, into a guinea fowl, into a duck, into a chicken, into a pheasant, into a goose, into a turkey, all nestled inside of a bustard. The garden warbler, the final bird to be stuffed, is so small that it can only be stuffed with a single olive.

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The older I get the more I feel myself tapering, various selves giving up the ghost. Once, there was light and me in it. Then bed times, then classrooms, then work, then catastrophe legible and boundless. There's no pollen on my wrists, no trigonometry in my brain. I am becoming specialized.

Nested

I practice at translation, representation, the art of naming loss—which is here, with us, in the air, as the distance between your shoulders. What kind of womb is this room? What kind of cosmos? What kind of connection? Rupture? Here where the breath of another just seeped into you, where dispersal is imminent, where simultaneity smolders. There is the distance between us. Our mouths can barely keep themselves from trying to correct this—word word word, swallow swallow, kiss. There is the distance between us, and it's material.

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When I smile at you I flash my teeth, my skull. Perhaps this is why smiling is a sign of affection or happiness—I am saying, "Look, death, which seems so far off, is in me too."